United States Environmental Protection Agency

Region 10 Emergency Response Unit

POLLUTION REPORT

I. HEADING

Date: June 20, 2001
Subject: Hermiston Lab Site
From: Dan Heister, OSC, USEPA, Region 10, Emergency Response Unit
Tel: Office (503) 326-6869
TO: See Distribution List on last page

POLREP No.1

II. BACKGROUND

Site ID: SSID # 108M
Delivery Order No: NA
Response Authority: CERCLA
FPN No: ORN001002272
NPL Status: NA
State Notification: Oregon Department of Environmental Quality
Action Memo Status: NA
Removal Start Date: June 8, 2001
Expected Completion Date: August 2001

III. SITE INFORMATION

A. Incident Category

Emergency Response Action

B. Site Description

1. Site Location

A defunct mining laboratory in Hermiston, Oregon, was identified by local authorities and the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) as potentially posing a threat to a dairy distribution center located adjacent to the laboratory in the same building at 81156 N. Highway 395, Hermiston, Oregon. The Hermiston Fire Department (HFD) hazardous materials unit

conducted a brief survey of the site and observed mercury, mercury oxide, sodium metal (immersed in oil in a plastic pitcher). Initial reports indicated the site also contained 800 pounds of potassium cyanide pellets in drums, eight 55-gallon drums of acid waste, sixteen 5-gallon buckets of acid sludge, twenty 1-gallon jugs of hydrochloric acid, thirty 1-gallon jugs of sulfuric acid, and hundreds of miscellaneous bottles each containing up to 2 pounds of chemicals.

ODEQ referred the site to EPA on June 7, 2001, when they determined that the amount and state of the chemicals at the site were beyond their capabilities. START and EPA responded to the site the morning of June 8, 2001, and met with Hermiston Fire Chief Jim Stearns who stated that there were many unknown chemicals and wastes at the site. He relayed that outside behind the laboratory there were several metal lockers, a truck trailer, and camper top which were believed to contain strong acids and other chemicals. Digital photographs taken by the fire department showed hundreds of laboratory grade bottles, drums containing cyanide, and various unknowns inside the laboratory. Photographs outside of the building displayed stained soils, mercury tubes, and several drums and dozens of five gallon buckets with unknown liquids and sludges.

C. Assessment Results

No prior assessment was conducted for this site.

IV. Response Information

A. Situation

1. Initial Situation

EPA and START mobilized from the HFD and met Mitch Clanahan at the site to determine the potential threat and assess further actions. Clanahan stated he was a friend of the deceased operator of Capmartin Mining lab, Earl Myers. According to Clanahan, he had been asked by Mr. Myers' mother to see if he could remove the wastes from the property. He realized that he could not dispose of all the chemicals/wastes and notified local authorities and/or ODEQ to examine the property.

Clanahan stated that Myers had experimented with several processes for precious metal recovery but two methods were most often used. One method was developed to recover the gold flash coating on computer circuit boards through a process called cyanidation. The metal coating is dissolved in an acid and cyanide solution. The solution is then filtered and the gold is precipitated with fine zinc powder. The cyanide and acid

wastes were then left outside to evaporate in large plastic trash barrels. The second method involved recovery of precious metals from jewelry scrap and dissolving the metal scrap with a strong mixture of hydrochloric and nitric acid. The metals were then precipitated with sodium bisulfide. Again, the wastes were allowed to evaporate outside.

Myers also had a fire assay oven in the laboratory that he used for determining metal content. The assay procedure involved wrapping lead around the metal sample and heating to a temperature that melts the lead. The soot from the lead was discharged outside without an air filter.

A brief inventory of the chemicals in the laboratory was conducted. Two drums appeared to be filled with sodium cyanide and potassium cyanide. Hundreds of small (less than 2 pounds) laboratory-grade chemicals were strewn throughout the laboratory with the majority located in a metal storage cabinet. A sodium metal brick was submersed in oil in a plastic drinking pitcher on a countertop with several other chemicals. Behind the building were approximately 35 small capacitors assumed to contain PCBs, a drum labeled as containing liquid ammonia, several drums with cyanide/acid wastes, dozens of glass containers and 5-gallon buckets with solid and liquid cyanide/acid wastes, unbroken glass mercury tubes, large marine batteries, hydrogen peroxide (oxidizer), and metal lockers and a camper top believed to contain at least 30 gallons of strong acids. Several photos were taken of the chemicals and wastes by both START and the OSC.

EPA determined the site would need to be secured due to the potential hazard to individuals who entered the area. Two locks and a chain were purchased to block entry to a fenced area behind the laboratory containing the majority of the acids, cyanide, PCBs, mercury, and chemical wastes. The building was locked by Clanahan.

EPA attempted to contact the landlord, but he was out of town. The OSC decided that EPA would discuss options at the site with the landlord before progressing with any further removal activities. The crew departed the site at 1620 hours on June 8, 2001.

2. Removal Actions to Date

Removal actions have been limited to conducting a brief inventory of chemicals and wastes at the site, and preparation of a START and EPA photographic documentation record. To impede access to the site, a chain was secured and locked from a back fence to the building.

3. Enforcement

Enforcement actions are being reviewed at this time by EPA.

B. Planned Response Activities

Chemical product and wastes will need to be removed from the site and disposed properly. Soils will also need to be assessed in stained areas and at routes of off-site migration.

C. Next Steps

EPA plans to speak with the landlord early next week and determine if the landlord is capable of conducting the proper cleanup actions.

V. Cost Information

Estimated costs are summarized below:

	Established Ceiling	Estimated Costs
EPA	$ 2,500	$ 600
START	$ 3,000	$ 2,800
Total	$ 5,500	$ 3,400

Note: The above accounting of expenditures is an estimate based on figures known to the OSC at the time this report was written. The cost accounting provided in this report does not necessarily represent an exact monetary figure which the government may include in any claim for cost recovery.

VI Disposition of Wastes

No wastes have been generated from removal actions thus far. Wastes generated from the cleanup activities will need to be disposed of in accordance with federal and state requirements.

VII Distribution

To:

Terry Eby, EPA Headquarters

Chris Field, Mary Matthews, OSCs, EPA Region 10 Emergency Response Unit
Oregon Department of Environmental Quality, Attention: Chuck Donaldson, Emergency Response
EPA Region 10, Attention: Mike Sibley
EPA Oregon Office, Attention: Dan Opalski
EPA Oregon Office, Attention: Dan Heister

VII Status

Site actions are pending.